

KATHY THE CELEBRITY

After Madiba was elected president of South Africa on 9 May 1994, he asked Kathy to be his Parliamentary Counsellor. Along with the job came a sharing of some of the demands placed on Madiba from celebrities, presidents and royalty from around the world. Not only did they want to meet him and be photographed with him, but they wanted him to take them on a tour of Robben Island.

He asked Kathy to help and so it came that everyone from Fidel Castro to Bill Clinton, from Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey had the benefit of Kathy personal tour of the prison that held him for 18 of his 26 years in jail. He is naturally asked by 'lesser mortals' about what the 'celebrities' are like. But Kathy, being Kathy does not choose. He cannot choose, they are just interested people all listening to his stories, drawing in the anecdotes of the miserable days on the windswept island when there was little thought in the world about the fate of the small clutch of freedom fighters that had been dumped there to be forgotten. They were "all the same" except one – a 12-year-old Afrikaner girl from Secunda, Kathy met her while he was escorting the Nobel Literature Prize Laureate, Nadine Gordimer to the Island.

Michelle Brits shyly asked him for his autograph and he took them on a tour of the prison. During the tour he told that the child was dying of leukaemia and had been brought to Robben Island by the Reach for a Dream Foundation. Her other wish was to meet President Mandela.

Kathy was struck by her:

“
A child of that age doesn't know what death is, you know? Children are children. On the ferry back she's just running around like other children do.
 ”

Parliament was in recess so he went to Madiba's home to ask whether the child could visit him. Madiba, not wanting to put her out offered to go to her. So this is how the last wish of a dying child from a small town in South Africa came true. Two comrades who understood what it was like to suffer and who, through their suffering drew them increasingly to the innocence and wonder of children made her dream a reality.

So whenever he is asked about celebrities, Kathy shrugs and tells the story of Michelle Brits.



Kathy and Olusegun Obasanjo

Kathy and Will Smith



Kathy with Indian Delegation

“
How that is what stuck in my mind. And that is my, the one visit that made the biggest impact on me. So I still keep her photograph, you know? She is holding onto the grille in my cell, unfortunately the photograph that was taken for me and her, that never came out.
 ”

But at least I've got her photograph. So there again, it was a child that you know made the biggest impact of really these scores and scores of people I have accompanied to the Island. It was just this child, Michelle – Michelle Brits.

Some of the awards received by Kathy:

- "Isitwalandwe/Seaparankwe"; the highest award of the ANC, awarded in 1988 but officially bestowed in 1992
- The ANC's Merit Award, for long service
- Presidential Order for Meritorious Service; Class 1: Gold, 1999
- Honorary Doctorate: University of Massachusetts, May, 2000
- Honorary Doctorate by the University of Durban-Westville, 2002
- Doctorate of Humane Letters by the University of Missouri, January 2004
- Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, by President of India, January 2005
- Doctor of Humanities, Michigan State University, December 2005

1989
Released from Pollsmoor Prison on October 15



1991
Elected to NEC of ANC and becomes Head of ANC Public Relations Department

1992
Went on Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca with his brother Solly and family



1994
Elected Member of Parliament and served as Mandela's Parliamentary Counsellor until 1999

1994
Elected Chairperson of the Robben Island Museum Council and served until his term expired in 2006



1997
Declined nomination to the ANC National Executive Committee

1999
Appointed as Trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which is set up to support Mandela during his retirement



2008
Founds the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation to promote non-racialism



Michelle Brits



Kathy with President Castro



Kathy with Oprah and crew



Kathy and Hillary Clinton



Kathy and Barack Obama